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Keef

BY
T. W. COAKLEY

A LIFE-STORY IN NINE PHASES



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KEEF

A Life-Story in Nine Phases

BY

TIMOTHY WILFRED COAKLEY

With Illustrations by Ritchie

BOSTON

CHARLES E. BROWN & CO.

1897



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TO HER
WHO KNOWS HIM BEST, YET LOVES HIM MOST,
THIS BOOK IS FONDLY DEDICATED
BY THE AUTHOR





A WORD TO THE WISE.

It is nearly a year since I came into possession of the subjoined memoirs. The manuscript was accompanied by the following posthumous missive, dated and postmarked at Tangiers, Morocco :

MY DEAR CHALMERS : — When this reaches you, you will be the one man in all the world that knows aught of the history unfolded in the enclosed manuscript. With an important few of the details narrated therein you are already familiar. You have listened, with the intelligent sympathy which I counted on receiving from an occultist like yourself, while I rehearsed the story of my experiments and confided to you certain abnormal experiences which it had been my good fortune to enjoy. Moreover, to you, and to you alone, of living men,

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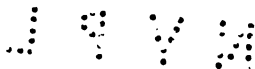
A WORD TO THE WISE.

it has been given to look upon the canvas which the image of the radiant Esther transfigured and glorified. You were invited to view the opening scenes of a curious life drama. It is only fair that you should be informed of its consummation; and so I have set down the chronicle of my life, whiling away, thereby, many wearisome hours of a bodily illness which will soon be happily at an end. I beg you to make whatsoever use you may of the narrative; and, if you find it bald and crude in the telling, be good enough to remember that to the hand trained to wield the brush, the pen is, at best, but an awkward makeshift. I rest quite confident that our congenial selves will meet again, when and where, it were idle to discuss, for such a reunion can hardly come about until, for us, the fictions of time and space have ceased to exist. Until then, and ever thereafter, I am

Your friend,

LEON ABECASSIS.

It is not necessary for me to give the circumstances of my first meeting with the



A WORD TO THE WISE.

painter, Abecassis. The history of our friendship is sufficiently treated in the memoirs that follow. Let me say, however, that he was the most fascinating character I have ever known. That he was a genius, no one who knew him doubted. His name, had he so willed it, might have been famous on the tongues of his fellowmen, for he had the sacred gift which won renown for the masters of his art. Yet he lived serenely unknown, within hand's-reach of the honors he scorned to claim. Quite naturally, in relating a series of remarkable psychological experiences, Abecassis has omitted all mention of his personal appearance. This was so striking as to make him a marked man in any company. He was tall and slender, yet not lean. His form was moulded with exquisite delicacy, and his face was strangely, darkly beautiful. He wore a beard, but its short and silky growth served rather to accentuate than to conceal the shapely contour of his chin and the

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sensuous, yet clean-cut, lips. His eyes were black, large and brilliant as carbon. In conversation, he was incomparably impressive. Looking into the lustrous gloom of his great eyes, and listening to his finely modulated voice, one utterly forgot the speaker, in contemplating the ideas which he put forth. For one who lived so largely on idealistic lines, the painter had a curiously analytical mind, and much of the fascination which he exercised over his fellows was doubtless due to the peculiar co-ordination in his mentality of a lofty imagination with the rarest and subtlest reasoning powers.

In conclusion, I may say that while I failed to convert him to the beautiful and ennobling cult of Esoteric Buddhism, Abecassis was more or less imbued with the mysticism of the Orient. I may add that his nature was pre-eminently impressionable, sensitive and susceptible, in a remarkable degree, to all influences whether mate-

A WORD TO THE WISE.

rial or spiritual. I make this avowal thus frankly, at the outset, so that the captious reader may the more readily, by evolving matter-of-fact theories from this premise, explain away, to his own satisfaction, a tale which might otherwise startle him by its unconventional character. These prefatory notes are written and these memoirs published, not for him, but for that wise and sympathetic circle who believe with Abecassis that there are depths in life as yet unplumbed by science, and that only by careful introspection and the study of individual psychic experiences will the mystic veil be lifted that screens the kingdom of the spirit from the world of sense.

Respectfully,

EDGAR CHALMERS, THEOSOPHIST.

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PHASE I.

THE HOUSE OF VISIONS.

I, ABECASSIS, Leon Abecassis, was born thirty years ago, in Tangiers, Morocco, the white-walled city on the cliffs that front Gibraltar. Were it pertinent to my present purpose, I might trace my ancestry to one of the most renowned of those Jewish scholars whose genius and attainments made memorable the era of Moslem rule in Spain, and who, after the conquest of Granada, followed their Moorish patrons into African exile. But I desire rather to set down the experiences of my individual self

than to rehearse the virtues which tradition has ascribed to my forefathers. At an early age I developed a passionate aptitude for painting, and this inclination was sedulously fostered by my father. I was his only child. My mother had died in giving me birth, and the lightest wish of her orphaned boy had become as law to the sombre man of affairs. Perhaps, in encouraging my taste for art, he was cultivating, vicariously, and with a father's pride, an element in his own nature which had been all but uprooted by the sordid exigencies of trade. He had long since retired from active business, and occupied himself with the management of the fortune which, in the natural course of things, was destined to be mine.

THE HOUSE OF VISIONS.

I got my first lessons in the use of the brush from an *attaché* of the Italian legation in Tangiers. The city of my home was rich in those gorgeous tints and picturesque bits of life that are as meat and wine to the art student. In the universal carnival of color, I revelled as a flower revels in sunshine. I sketched everything in the town: the Bedouins, swart and gaunt, swathed in their flowing, white bournouses; the sleek, red-fezzed merchants, squatted in the bazaar; the frantic santos dancing in the streets; the groups of patient camels newly arrived from the desert with the spoils of the Sou-dan; the slave women standing with bared, ebon breasts in the mart where human flesh was bought and sold. A subject to

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which I eagerly applied my boyish brush was a group of smokers, such as may be seen, to this day, in any of the resorts devoted to the sale of keef. Keef, it may be said, is a Moorish preparation of Indian hemp, and, in its essential principle, is identical with the hasheesh of the Turks and the majoon of Calcutta. But while both hasheesh and majoon are used in the form of a paste or confection, prepared from the juices of the plant, keef consists of the leaves and tender parts of the plant itself. These are pulverized; and the fumes of the powder—which is frequently mixed with a mild and aromatic tobacco—are then inhaled into the lungs through the medium of tiny pipes of burnt clay. The practice had in it nothing attrac-

THE HOUSE OF VISIONS.

tive to me, aside from its picturesque features. What could I, buoyant-spirited youth that I was, know of the multifarious and potent forces which teach the jaded worldling the virtues of nepenthe as infallibly as the babe's instinct impels it to suckle the mother's breast? Indeed, it never once occurred to me that these wan men I found drugging their memories with the fragrant narcotic were my weary fellows in the flesh, seeking respite from the sorrows of humanity. Rather, they seemed, to my youthful fancy, the unsubstantial personages of an Arabian night, or, if you will, a set of lay figures tricked out, in graceful guise, to gratify my whim and pose upon my canvas.

The resort which I visited was

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patronized by the moneyed class of Moors, and, not infrequently, a member of the European colony might be seen to enter its secluded portal. It was known in the city as the House of Visions. A sleepy-eyed Moor lounged eternally at the entrance and greeted all comers with the salutation in guttural Arabic: "*Bismillah*, blessed be keef!"

Within, private stalls, luxuriously appointed, were provided for the unsocial few; and for the more companionable smokers one large apartment, furnished with sumptuous divans, sufficed. In this common room, I used to sit for hours, leaving only when the fumes of the keef, involuntarily inhaled, warned me by a slight, feverish exhilaration, to seek the air of the

THE HOUSE OF VISIONS.

street. I then invariably hastened to my little studio and transferred my impressions to canvas. I called my painting "The House of Visions," and, in my fond conceit, I thought it a masterpiece. Even now, as I recall it, I fancy there was a crude realism in the work not wholly devoid of merit. I had faithfully depicted the familiar scene. The great, square room, its walls, draped with the brilliant tapestries of Fez, and studded with polished scimitars and shields; the turbaned and betrousered Moors dreaming on the divans, their forms dimly outlined in the twilight emitted by the single lantern pendent from the ceiling; the cloudy canopy of smoke, pierced, here and there, by the starry glow of a blazing keef-pipe, — these

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were the essential features of the picture.

On its completion, I fetched my father to my studio and proudly showed him my work. It was plain that the execution of the painting pleased him beyond measure, but he was surprised and pained by the theme. He praised my skill in a few, fond words, only to finish by exacting from me a promise that I should never again enter the House of Visions. I loved him too well to question his motive or dispute his bidding. The House of Visions knew me no more; and its mimic counterpart on my canvas was soon relegated to the moths and mould of the lumber-room. For the nonce, the apparition of keef which, in crossing my boyhood's path, had

THE HOUSE OF VISIONS.

so sorely perturbed my father, was laid. Neither he nor I could know that that spirit was fated to rise again and become the familiar of my manhood and the arbiter of my life.

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The current of my youth ran calmly on in the quaint, old, Moorish city. I spent my days, when not in the studio, in sketching along the coast, or in the rugged hills that skirt the town. My evenings were passed in the polyglot library which my father had collated in his travels about the world. Like all Tangierines, I was something of a linguist. Spanish and Arabic I spoke from my babyhood, without distinction in facility; and my father had been at pains to school me in English, a language with

which he had become familiar during a residence of many years in London, at a period before my birth. At the end of my eighteenth year, I betook myself to Rome, with a view to completing my education in art. I spent three years in the Eternal City, during which time I applied myself to copying the old masters, under the immediate direction of the most famous painters of the day. I worked with unremitting devotion. My canvases were admired by my fellow-students and praised by my tutors; but I had long since learned, in bitterness of soul, how weak and unworthy were my achievements beside the productions of genius. My first visit to the galleries of Rome served effectually to quench whatever

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spark of boyish vanity had found a lodgement in my breast. Several *dilettanti* whose acquaintance I made in the Bohemian circles of the city pretended to have discovered a budding genius in the person of my poor self, and urged me to put my canvases on the market. I laughed at them for their pains. I felt it in me to equal the petty performances of the day, but I scorned to enter into such a competition. The first canvas which I gave to the world as mine must needs be a work of real genius. I would leap to greatness at one bound, or, if climb I must, the ascent should be accomplished in the privacy of the closet. There, failure and progress alike would be screened from the unsympathetic stare of the multitude. And so I

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committed to the flames one after another of my productions, yet without losing heart. I determined to scour all Europe and, in the art-collections of the capitals of the earth, to search unweariably for the secret touch of greatness by which the antique masters had transfigured their canvases.

PHASE II.

THE SCIENCE OF INTOXICATION.

I WAS in this frame of mind when the unexpected and sudden death of my father recalled me to Tangiers. Henceforth, I was to be alone with my ambition. I conformed to the inevitable and tried to fancy that my bereavement was for the best. But Tangiers, after the funeral, was haunted by depressing memories and I was glad to get back to Europe and my art. I took with me on my tour, as personal attendant, my father's body-servant, Hassan, a Soudanese negro of fabulous ugliness and gigantic stature, who loved me with the savage loyalty of a dog. In

the course of the next few years, I visited the chief cities of the Continent. I sought out the works of the masters in the public galleries and in the parlors of the *cognoscenti*. I fed my eyes to satiety on the luscious tints of Correggios, Veroneses and Titians without number. I gloated on the exquisite harmonies evoked by the magic pencil of Raffaele, the sculpturesque finish of Angelo's productions and the marvellous fidelity to nature of Rembrandt's lights and shadows. I studied the choicest products of every school, from the brilliant landscapes of the Flemish colorists to the gloomy grandeurs of the Spanish masters. But the farther I progressed, the higher became the standard which I set for myself. Advance as I might, my

THE SCIENCE OF INTOXICATION.

inordinate ambition still tantalized me. At times, I fell into fits of dejection, which I terminated, not infrequently, by throwing aside palette and spatula and plunging into the frivolous gayeties of society, and the more questionable dissipations of the men about town. It was after one of these occasional departures from my usual orbit, that I crossed from Paris to London and busied myself with an inquiry into the peculiarities of the English school of art. I was not long in making the acquaintance of congenial spirits here, in the world's metropolis.

Among them, was a man who, insomuch as he became my close companion and intimate friend, needs a few words of description. This was Edgar Chalmers, or, as

he commonly styled himself, "Edgar Chalmers, Theosophist." A cultured gentleman was Chalmers, subdued and reserved in manner, and intensely imaginative. He was a devoted student of the Indian philosophies and a rapt and eager follower of Buddhistic dogma. He believed that he had a mission to prepare the Occident for the reception of the light which had dawned on Asia, back in the forgotten centuries, and he missed no opportunity of impressing his doctrines upon his friends. His temperament was spiritual to a fault, and his application to the Ramayana and the Bhaghavad-Ghītā had intensified a disposition which was congenital. But while I disagreed with the views of life which this warm-hearted, blue-eyed American

cherished, I could not stultify myself by deriding his conclusions. It was not for me, who had long since cut loose from the simple faith of my fathers and now stood dazed and dumb before the mystery of creation, to laugh at the solution with which he had stayed the questionings of his soul. There was a piquancy in his genial pessimism that charmed me. I delighted in listening to his naïve exposition of the beauties of "renunciation," the mystic influences of "karma," and the negative bliss of the "Nirvana" which, to him, was the highest good. At least, he had the merit of being unconventional and sincere, and there was an ideality in his nature which strongly appealed to me. He had a loyal faith in my genius and

courted my society. With many tastes in common and abundant leisure in which to gratify them it is not strange that we soon became chums.

When three months had slipped away and Chalmers was making ready to sail for his home in New York, I had become so much attached to him that the prospect of parting was not to be faced without a protest. Chalmers could not stay, to be sure. His presence was required in the American metropolis, where he was about to take editorial charge of a theosophical review. But there was nothing to prevent me from accompanying him across the Atlantic and making a visit to the New World. When I broached the idea to Chalmers, he was loud in his de-

THE SCIENCE OF INTOXICATION.

light, and the upshot of the matter was that I engaged passage for the faithful Hassan and myself on the same steamer which was to bear my friend to his transatlantic home.

Arrived in New York, I found distraction and recreation to the full in studying the strange types and curious social conditions which are the natural outgrowth of a recent and cosmopolitan civilization. Temporarily I forgot the pleasures and pains of the aspiring painter, and gave myself up to comradeship and Bohemianism. With Chalmers as sponsor, I met all the bright fellows whose wit enlivens the great dailies, and that other, more dignified coterie, the magazine men. I was initiated into the Siesta Club, an organization in

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which my friend was a leading spirit. It had a curious make-up, the Siesta Club, and the evolution of such a body would have been hardly possible in a city of the stereotyped and caste-bound Old World. Among its members were lawyers, physicians, stock-brokers, politicians of every party, journalists and literarians. Well-nigh all the races of Europe were represented on its membership roll, and, in many respects, it was typical of the composite life of New York. Good-fellowship was the sole test by which applicants for admission were tried, and any one with a veneer of good breeding was pretty sure to pass muster, if he relished a bottle, a bird and a spicy saying. I found life at the Siesta a new and grateful experience. The un-



A BOTTLE AND A BIRD.

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constrained exchange of sentiments and the unconventional mode of expression which obtained in this Bohemian set, were a revelation to me. It was a relief to lay aside the buckram formality of European capitals, and, over a flask of mellow wine, to bare, for one brief hour, one's heart to one's fellow.

Indeed, the charms of the club were such that I should have soon become a fixture in its daily life, were it not that ambition, tugging at my heart strings, recalled me to my easel. I determined that, for the present, New York should be my home, and I cast about me for a suitable domicile, leasing finally an abandoned mansion in the outskirts of Central Park. This I fitted up with an Oriental pomp which gladdened the heart and

KEEP.

kindled the black and listless eyes of Hassan, whom I installed as major-domo. I now gave myself up to painting with all my early ardor. From daybreak to dark, I toiled in my studio, indulging once again those golden hopes which lure the amateur to fancy himself a genius. Yet, I could not deny to myself my failure. While my productions were faultless in form and coloring, and artistically correct in conception, there was somehow lacking in them that divine suggestion of power which makes the paltry canvas live and speak along the centuries. I began to fear that I had fallen into the vulgar error of mistaking a lively appreciation of the beautiful and an abiding yearning after the ideal, for the possession of ideality. And still, I felt

intimations of something within me that needed only opportunity and development to make of me an artist. There were evanescent moments when I felt myself inspired, and when a strengthening and informing element, which might have been the spirit of Angelo or Raffaele, filled me. Alas! So fleeting were these spasms of creative impulse that they were often gone before I had time to awaken from introspection, and, in every case, the inspiration fled before the detailed drudgery of execution. I was in a melancholy state of mind, indeed, when a saving thought occurred to me.

“If there were only some way” — I said to myself — “by which the transient exaltation of spirit which I have so often experienced

could be sustained, then,—ah, then,
—I might be the painter that I
am not!”

Could it be possible that there
was in nature some material
agency which would accomplish
the desired result? The experi-
ment was worth trying, and I de-
liberately set at work to find a
drug which would assist the opera-
tions of the creative imagination.
It was a quest on which, probably,
no man had ever wittingly entered.
Myriads had given themselves over
to narcotics and stimulants through
inadvertence, discovering too late
that they had fixed a habit, where
they but sought to indulge a whim.
The temptations to which they had
succumbed I was about to court,
and this, too, with the settled pur-
pose and cool premeditation of an

THE SCIENCE OF INTOXICATION.

empiricist. I appreciated the risks which I ran in submitting a temperament so sensitive as mine to the action of powerful nervous irritants; but the stake for which I played was worth the hazard, and I had full faith in the strength of my recuperative faculties and in the sanity of my will.

In the privacy of my apartments, under the watchful care of the unquestioning Hassan, I started on a series of experiments which lasted for several months. I tried in turn, thoroughly, and under all sorts of physical conditions, the effects of alcohol, absinthe, cocaine and opium. All to no purpose. Alcohol, used in light doses, was powerless to help me. When taken freely, it produced an exhilaration altogether too feverish to

be valuable, and soon succeeded by uneasy delirium, with subsequent stupor. Absinthe and cocaine produced in me a kind of mental paralysis. Opium I used in various forms, and, for a time, I flattered myself that I had found the wonder-working agency for which I was searching. But this drug proved as disappointing as its fellows. I abandoned it when I had fully satisfied myself that its power was confined to the stimulation of the grosser elements of the imagination. I can understand how the metaphysical mind of the English opium-eater found in the drug a wealth of sensuous imagery which reinforced and illumined the severe beauties of his thought. But I needed no such stimulus. There was no lack of sensuousness

in my tropical nature. What I sought to quicken and develop was the higher soul-faculty,—the germ of spirituality which informs and vivifies every true work of art.

I had succeeded, not without a struggle, in escaping from the domination of the drugs which I have enumerated, and I was about to dip into the pharmacopœia with a view to experimenting still further, when a chance (or should I say a preordained?) happening altered the course of my investigations. One night, I drifted into a tobacconist's shop near Union Square. I was about to buy a package of cigarettes, when I was struck by the strangely familiar look which the place bore. The shop consisted of one long room, the farther portion of which was

KEEF.

veiled from view by a curtain of red fustian. As I entered, the drapery was thrust aside and a lean, sallow-faced fellow with Semitic features stepped behind the counter to wait on me. At the same moment, a delicate, yet pungent, aroma saluted my nostrils and quickened my memory with the suggestive force peculiar to a familiar odor. It was the subtle and unmistakable incense of keef.

This unexpected meeting with the Moorish drug filled me on the instant with new hope. Keef!—The very thing. Why had I not thought of it long before? By reason, probably, of my long acquaintance with its use. Civilized man is prone to adopt the obvious and natural mode of procedure only after he has exhausted his in-

genuity in following fruitlessly more recondite methods. I turned to the tobacconist, and addressed him unhesitatingly in the jargon of Arabic and Spanish which is the current speech in the streets of Tangiers. He replied in the same tongue and with the eager effusiveness of the exile who meets with a fellow-countryman. His name, he told me, was Benatuil, a patronymic as well known to me as was mine to the tobacconist. The little world within the walls of Tangiers is not so wide but that a family name will be recognized by a son of "the Sacred City," even though he may fail to identify the man who bears it. Without loss of time, I communicated to my new-found acquaintance my desire to indulge in keef, and I was at

once cordially invited to join him in a pipe. He led me into his retreat behind the turkey-red hangings, where I was duly presented to two compatriots who, like my host, were *tabaqueros*.

The nook in which I found myself was furnished faithfully in Moorish style, and with decorative effects that were quite surprising in view of the commonplace character of its occupants. Huge shields of hammered brass shone flame-like on the tapestried walls. A massive bronze lantern, suspended by a brazen chain, dangled from the ceiling. Rugs of picturesque patterns, though coarse in fabric, littered the floor, and here and there were ottomans covered with a mosaic of stained leather. In the centre of the room stood a

table, lying on which were several reed-stemmed pipes of red clay. There, too, heaped in the middle of the board, and gleaming duskily in the lantern light, with the metallic lustre of a miser's treasure, lay a quantity of Indian hemp. One of my host's visitors was indolently stripping the yellow-green leaves from their parent twigs and powdering them between his brown palms. His companion puffed at a keef-pipe with tranquil complacency, stopping, now and then, to mix the powdered herb with portions of fine-cut Havana leaf. A pack of well-thumbed *naipes*, the playing-cards of the Spanish, stared, face upward, from the table.

I had been so long severed in spirit, as well as body, from the old life of Tangiers that this recur-

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rence to the scenes of my dreamy boyhood was a rich treat for me; and when my host brought forth from some mysterious recess a pot of steaming, black coffee, I was only too ready to throw myself on an ottoman and join in the feast. It may have been due to my haphazard contact with an environment which renewed the memories of my youth; it may have been due to the subtle influence of the keef fumes, unconsciously inhaled; but, to whatsoever the effect may be attributed, I felt that I was about to enter a new sphere of existence. I eyed Benatuil intently as he proceeded, with solemn Eastern courtesy, to prepare a pipe with its fragrant charge; and I could not have experienced a greater awe if he were some mighty



AN AMBROSIAL NIGHT.

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hypnotist, working a spell with which to snare my soul. I remember strangely, and as one remembers a long-gone, sweet experience, the succeeding happenings of that night. I know that there passed a period of lazy contemplation. We chatted of Tangiers, and I saw its tangled streets and sunlit walls in the azure clouds which I blew from my first keef-pipe. I smoked immoderately, and my mood merged, after a while, into one of divine merriment. My matter-of-fact associates disclosed to me the most heroic qualities. Their gossip was the loftiest sentiment, their dull badinage, the sublimest wit. Their mirth was as the laughter of the gods. I could not but share in it and count myself an Olympian, too.

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I remember — not indistinctly, yet remotely — seeking my bachelor home and threading my way through the streets of the great city with a rare sense of exaltation and in a mood which lent to the meanest of objects a regal grace, an ideal charm. The town to me was a metropolis of fairy-land. The electric stars which glittered along the prosaic thoroughfare I knew at sight for the elemental lightnings harnessed by the genius of humanity. I looked on the great buildings, towering dizzily skyward, and learned that mortal man, as in the olden myth, still labors to scale high heaven. Here was a romance of architecture fresher and truer than that which clothes ancestral palaces, mosques and castellated piles. The horse-

less car shamed the triumphal chariot of Cæsar. The work-a-day mob of passers-by were my brothers now, — a radiant company of immortals; and the wan and shrivelled sandwich-man who jostled me, as he went by, was no shabby toiler of the slums, but a noble spirit in whose face I read the record of a tragic duel with fate. Arrived at my rooms, I yielded to the insistent influence of the drug and fell into a fitful slumber, interspersed with the glory of great thoughts and cheerful sentiments. Then came a period of vague suggestion, an uplifting of the heart, a panting after the sweet waters of the fountains of the ideal and the unknown, an undefined attraction towards some mysterious affinity, a period when I felt and knew that there

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was some puissant entity seeking
to reach and act upon my life.
And while seeking to fathom the
problem, I was environed by dis-
tracting dreams and beguiled into
oblivion.

PHASE III.

A NEW PYGMALION.

My first experience of the witchery of keef delighted and gratified me beyond expression. I was satisfied that at last I had realized, in some measure, the dream with which I had solaced myself for months back; that I had found the long-sought key to the treasure-house of ideals. Without so much as a scruple as to its ultimate effect upon my physical and mental being, I surrendered myself to the alluring influence of the drug. The spell it wrought was essentially different from the effects obtained by the use of any of the agencies with which I had hitherto

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experimented. In the condition induced by keef there was nothing of alcoholic fever, nothing of the gross gratification which opium-eaters know. So far from relating to animal delights, the pleasure experienced was distinctively moral. In the keef dream, the physical self was lulled into a state of unperturbed rest, while the higher mental faculties were stimulated to abnormal activity. The senses found Nirvana; the soul, enfranchisement. The zest that gratified ambition brings; the intoxication of the orator, buoyed up on a sea of plaudits; the divine delirium of the poet; the ecstasy of the great captain who hears the huzzas of his triumphant legions,—these were the raptures which keef awarded to its votary.

On the day following my first keef dream, I visited Benatuil's and procured a store of the drug, for I found myself already longing to smoke with uncontrollable desire. To be sure, I had not as yet the acquired appetite which enslaves the habitual smoker, but I had a no less potent motive in the belief that the drug was an instrument through which I could stimulate my imagination to such an extent as to realize on canvas the visions which had been dimly and momentarily foreshadowed to my spirit. I was not long in discovering that the mystic effect of the drug was marked by three successive stages which could be differentiated from one another without difficulty.

The first stage was a languorous

reverie, in which all material cares were eliminated from life, and the mind, freed from the tasks and distractions of the sordid world, floated calmly and reposefully along pleasing channels of thought. As the drug gained in power, this phase was followed by that of fantasy. Here the mind took note of the phenomena of the physical universe with a truer and subtler apprehension than normally. The percipient discovered something of the beautiful in all things, interpreted nature and art alike with unfailing cheerfulness and grasped instinctively the dignity of life and all the finer joys and truths of existence. Finally, there came the exaltation of spirit to which I have already alluded and which undoubtedly constituted the chief

charm of the drug. This was a state in which the mind seemed, for the nonce, in full accord with the infinite, in which time and space, pain and remorse, misgiving and satiety, were blotted out in one, supreme, ecstatic sense of being. This culminating stage was succeeded, all too quickly, by a coma-like sleep.

In due time, I learned that the phenomena, both in the state of fantasy and in that of ecstasy, were perceptibly affected by the mood in which I found myself when setting out to smoke. This was so true that I studied to put myself in a responsive frame of mind, and on a high plane of thought, before wooing the drug. I usually sought the pipe after protracted meditations upon high philosophies, or

when fresh from poring over the splendid pages of the world's great poets. In this way I found that, by saturating my imagination with a drama of Shakespeare's or Calderon's, a lyric of Omar Khayyám's, or one of Emerson's essays. I could not only map out, in part, the trend of my fantasies, but could even lend color to the ecstatic stage of the keef trance. I saw to it, also, that my material environment was such as to suggest and sustain a lofty train of thought. The appointments of my keef chamber, while they partook of Oriental luxury, were marked by the intellectual and refined taste of the Saracenic era and had nothing in common with the grosser forms and fleshly coloring of the Turkish school.

While under the spell of keef, I

spent many hours in painting, and I could not but be pleased at the improvement shown by my work. Among my productions, at this period, were a "Tangierine Jewess" and a study of "Dawn in the Desert." Chalmers, whose friendship and sympathy never failed me, was particularly enthusiastic over these pieces; and he was fond of insisting that for beauty of coloring and artistic truth they were distinctly superior to any of the canvases of Benjamin Constant. But, in my passionate yearning after higher things, I remained unsatisfied and refused to exhibit my works. Much less would I put them on the market. Nothing short of the attainments of a Raffaele or an Angelo would content me. Hopefully I labored on,

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putting my faith in keef and smoking unremittingly. While at work, with my brain steeped in the fumes of the wonder-working weed, I was forever vexed by the intervention of unconsciousness. The coma which terminated my ecstasies was sure to come upon me all too soon, sealing my vision to the revelation that I sought, and barring the way to the inmost sanctuary of the Ideal which had become my God. The fault was in me, I argued, not in the drug. The grossness of my mind was such that the subtler intuitions, the loftier flights of soul, were beyond me. At times I caught myself wondering whether the missing element in my mental make-up was the experience of love, but this idea I put aside as frivolous. None the less, did I

cling to the conviction that, by training and developing my better nature, I might compass the fulfilment of my desires. The sublime thoughts which gem the masterpieces of literature shone into my consciousness and seemed to impart to me something of the luminous inspiration of the authors. Accordingly, I burrowed in the books of the immortals and kept spiritual company with the greatest of the thinkers of earth. In this way, months glided by. I seemed no nearer the coveted goal; but I was a child of golden hope, and somehow I felt sure that the word was yet to be spoken which should open for me the portal at which I sat and waited.

My one social relaxation, save for a rare and brief sojourn at the

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Siesta Club, was the companionship of Chalmers. He visited me well-nigh daily. He brought me the newest books and the latest intelligence of the world from which I lived apart. There came an evening when he called upon me, and when, as was our custom, we sat and talked late into the night. That is, Chalmers talked and I listened in sympathy, while he discoursed, in his inimitable and suggestive way, on literature, art and his favorite theme, the occult marvels of this mysterious universe. To me that night is as the Hegira to the Islamite. It stands in the same relation to my spiritual being which the day of my birth bears to my cruder self. When Chalmers had gone, I betook myself to my keef-pipe.

A NEW PYGMALION.

While smoking, I picked up a volume which my friend had left, and of which he had spoken appreciative words. I was somewhat curious to learn the charm which the book held for him. "A New Pygmalion" was a novel, and Chalmers was accustomed to laud but few novels. Again, it was a recent publication, anonymous, and, as my friend had informed me, the sensation of the day. Ordinarily, this, of itself, would have prejudiced my fastidious friend against the work. I opened the volume and scanned the pages listlessly, almost dreamily; but I had not proceeded far, when the work stirred my interest. As I read, I found myself enthralled alike by the story and the style, and soon the recurring bother of replenish-

ing my pipe became such a vexation that I rang for Hassan and imposed the task on him.

It was a simple tale. The hero was an author who, in his first romance, embodied in the heroine his ideal of womanhood. A copy of his book fell into the hands of a maiden on whom the portrayal of this heroine made so deep an impression that, unconsciously, she modelled her life and formed her character after the prototype who lived only on the printed page. In his maturity, the author, by a happy chance, met this maiden and, attracted by the very incarnation of his cherished fancy, wooed her and won her hand. Such was the story, but it was written with unique power. The writer of "A New Pygma-

lion " had a rare gift of impressing the reader with her own individuality. She had translated herself into her book. I say "she," and advisedly, for I had not finished the tale before I was convinced that the anonymous writer was a woman. There were passages in the story which spoke to me with the directness and personality of a lyric. A certain, dainty strength, a peculiarly tender, yet vigorous, conception of life marked the work. The love scenes were palpitant with the pulsings of a woman's heart. There was in them a delicacy of tone, a sympathetic ideality of treatment, quite out of keeping with the masculine method in art. But the sovereign excellence and chief beauty of this matchless tale lay in the character of the

heroine. Chalmers had lightly alluded to a likeness which he fancied to exist between the hero and myself. The parity, if there was one, escaped me. Enough that we were alike in the one, paramount fact that we were both devoted to the heroine. The passion which the women of my social world had failed to stir was instantly fanned to a white heat by the breath of the unknown writer's genius. I was in love, madly in love, with the heroine of her creation. And, as I read and re-read, the conviction grew on me that the object of this sudden and supreme desire, the woman on whom, in that moment, I had centred all the interests of my soul, was no mere figment of imagination, but an existent being, purer, nobler, better than



HASSAN AT WORK.

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A NEW PYGMALION.

our kind, yet human as myself. In portraying a woman incomparably lovely in mind and person, I felt that the nameless writer had but projected her sweet self onto her page. While I abandoned myself to the spell of the novelist, I was conscious of a personality behind the book, tender, sympathetic, yet commanding withal. The style, chaste and strong, combined with the majesty of the great thoughts it clothed to lift me to a pitch of spiritual enthusiasm such as I had vainly striven after in my patient past. Could it be that this unknown writer had given voice to the message for which I waited, the words which I had sought in vain through the pages penned by the great ones of earth? From this little wayside spring, was I

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to dip the draught which should prove to me as the waters of life?

Even so; for, with the thought, I felt myself transfigured. The personality which I had recognized as subtly pervading the volume in my hand, of a sudden, took to itself definite form and being. I was conscious of a presence close at hand, vague, at first, as the fumes of the keef that stained the candle-light, yet no less real. The next moment, I saw before me a vision of beauty so rare that the wonder in my spirit was not blasted by the contemplation of its loveliness. Standing by my side, as though risen from the storied page, I beheld the gracious shape of a woman whom I knew, at sight, for the ideal I had so long sought to

conjure out of the chaos of my dreams.

Words cannot paint the ecstasy I now experienced. My soul was shaken with joy, as with mighty music. It seemed that my very body was quickened with angelic attributes, like the glorified body of the Christian resurrection. I moved in a universe that was virgin to my thought, a world where matter and materialities were not, a realm of light and gladness and glamour which is not akin to earth and to describe which the language fashioned for the necessities of the lower life is all inadequate. If, in the opium trance, I was as Vathek in the Halls of Eblis, now, surely, keef had taught me the joys of Adam in Paradise. In a spiritual Eden I wandered

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hand in hand with the fairest of womankind. I drank the love-light in her wistful eyes. I mingled my self with hers. I meshed my soul in the netted gold of her hair.

Bismillah! Blessed be keef.

PHASE IV.

PHANTASM AND FLESH.

JUST how the keef trance merged into waking consciousness I cannot say. Certain it is that there must have intervened a period of unremembered activity, for I was startled to find a new canvas on the easel, and, on that canvas, sketched roughly in with a touch which I recognized as my own, the outlines of a new painting. Imagine my delight on finding that I had unwittingly obtained a sitting from the fair lady of my vision. I was jubilant at the prospect. Here was the promise that my loved one would brighten even my waking moments with her beauty. While

the recollection of her charms was vivid enough to enable me to proceed with the work, I preferred to trust to the inspiration of the wonder-working drug, and I lost no time in renewing its influence.

I applied myself to my pipe, and again that perfect face and frame took unto themselves their subtle substance. My spirit bride approached and laid her hand upon my brow, as though sealing it with the signet of the genius that beamed from her majestic eyes. Again I experienced that ardent communion of souls which poets have inadequately sung, and which the mass of mortals have faintly imaged forth as the bliss unattainable of perfect love. Again there came the blank of unconsciousness, and again, on waking, I was overjoyed

to find that notable progress had been made on the new painting. Thus matters went on for several weeks, until the picture had grown, under my unconscious brush, into a flawless and completed work. Then it was that I could have fallen down and worshipped my own handicraft. Surely, such a vision of human loveliness, whether in the flesh or on canvas, was never before vouchsafed to man.

The picture—or shall I not rather call it portrait?—was scrupulously faithful, in coloring and outline, to the incomparable original; and faithful, too, not in the formal, photographic way, but with that higher fidelity which seizes upon and reproduces character and life. There, definitely fixed, palpably present on the canvas, was the

slender, queenly grace of my angel love. The exquisitely moulded head was wreathed with silken hair that took its hue from the sun's own rays, and now glistened yellow as gold in the high light, now glowed in the shadow with the sombre glories of bronze. Her eyes, luminous and inspiring as when in phantom worlds they flashed their message of love to me, were counterfeited on my canvas. Blue were they, a dark blue, deep and rich, and, through the shadowy growth of their luxuriant lashes, they shone with a mystic, gem-like fire. Their splendor was vibrant now with passionate expectancy, and the lips, red-ripe and firm, yet delicate were faintly parted in aspiration. So looked she when she gave me greeting to the kingdom of the spirit.

To me this picture was at once a memento and a pledge. When my health threatened to break down utterly under the stress of too frequent indulgence in keef, I sought and found comfort in the contemplation of the canvas, while restoring my wasted frame. Then, too, there were times when, after several days of rigorous abstention from the drug, I became moody and sceptical, when I caught myself doubting the reality of my dual life and wondering whether I was the victim of an hallucination. The sense of loss and disenchantment which overwhelmed me on these occasions might have driven me mad, but for the possession of my precious canvas. I had but to step into my keef-chamber and draw the silken hangings from the

niche where I had mounted the painting, as a devotee might enshrine a Madonna, and I had before me the tangible and indisputable evidence of the truth of the higher existence and the love that sweetened it. Miracle or mystery it might be, if you will, but mistake — never. The most materialistic of men could not but admit that the picture, in conception and artistic treatment alike, was inspired in a nobler sense than any canvas given to the world by the masters of old. Sanzio the Divine, himself, never, in his happiest touches, approached the perfect beauty of my spirit bride.

That the phantasm I had prisoned on my canvas was that of the author of "A New Pygmalion," I did not doubt. The spirit which

pervaded the book was one with the pure nature of the creature of my vision. It was clear that in the heroine, Esther, the author had sketched herself; and between the character of Esther and that of my spirit consort there was the matchless fitness of things which constitutes ideal truth. In the course of time, I learned to call my dear one by that bright name with which she had christened the creature of her thought.

Through a natural desire to acquaint myself with the particulars of the earthly existence of my spirit bride, I made diligent inquiry in every practicable quarter with a view to discovering the whereabouts and the conventional identity of the author; but without avail. The literary circles of the

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city were agog with a like curiosity, alike unsatisfied. I made use of my friend, Chalmers, to cultivate an acquaintance with all the women of the bookish set of the metropolis, hoping that I might come upon the object of my search; but the prim and lettered ladies whom I met were hopelessly unlike Esther. I longed to penetrate this mystery. Entrancing as were my daily trysts with Esther, in our exalted soul-communion, earth and the things of earth had no part. Our converse was as the pure mingling of spirit with spirit; and, after the sweet ecstasies of my keef visions, I returned to the material world as ignorant of her place therein as she doubtless was of mine. How could I be certain, even, that she had not been cut

down by death, or that she might not be, to-day or to-morrow?

The weird communication which I had entered into with the spirit world, in lieu of lessening my fear of death, increased it. I feared nothing so much as change. How could I know but that death might work some cunning change in my nature or hers that would forever bar me from her world? Annihilation would be preferable to the interruption of our intercourse. She had become merged in my inmost being. The words of "A New Pygmalion" I knew by heart and treasured as hers. Her face and form were as real and familiar to me as my own. I found myself looking at every woman with a new interest, for who could tell but that, at any moment, I might

stumble upon my Esther in the flesh?

My visits to the Siesta Club had grown infrequent and perfunctory. I could not but contrast the atmosphere of the place with that of the flawless world through which my fair mate led me to the altars of the beautiful and the true. Of late, too, a certain member of the club had caused me no little annoyance. This man, whose name was Ralph Black, was something of a connoisseur in paintings, having once dealt in them, in fact, and having cultivated that versatile aptitude for gauging values which is characteristic of the Shylock. He professed to be much taken with a portrait of Chalmers which I had painted some months before and presented to my friend. He looked down on

me — he was a big man, ponderous and blonde and bland — and informed me that I “would do” and that I “could paint things that would sell.” He was lavish of this unsentimental appreciation, made a point of being pleasant, in his unctuous, elephantine way, and inflicted his company upon me whenever he found me at the club. I was not long left in the dark as to his object. One night, he suavely proposed that I should paint his wife.

“You see,” he said, “she’s an invalid, and it’ll be necessary to have the sittings at our home. There need not be any question about the price.”

I curtly informed Mr. Black that I was not in the business of portrait painting, and declined

out of hand to accede to his request.

Instinctively I hated this fellow. He was a Wall street railroad-wrecker whose wealth was set at fabulous figures. There were queer stories about his methods. I had heard Chalmers say that Black belonged to many clubs, which he joined, as he had joined ours, from no spirit of comradery, but for the business purpose of studying, in its unguarded hours of social ease, the world on which he preyed. But then, he gave sumptuous dinners, and, with the beaus and bloods about town, it is a maxim that champagne drowns a multitude of sins. My refusal did not daunt him. He continued to thrust his attentions upon me, and concluded by inviting me to take dinner with him at his home. I

guessed that by the blandishments of the entertainer he hoped to obtain as a favor what he could not buy as a service. Yet I accepted his invitation, mentally dooming him to disappointment, the while. Paint his wife I would not; but I could waive my objection to eating his dinner, and the opportunity to inspect the art treasures of which his house was said to be the repository was a temptation against which I was not proof.

When the appointed evening came, I found Mr. Black housed like a prince. From the hall, I was ushered by a sleek and stolid butler into a spacious reception-room. On every hand, I was confronted with the evidences of refinement and taste. I had anticipated luxury, but to find a man of

his type surrounded by an æsthetic atmosphere was something of a surprise. I accounted for this phenomenon by attributing it to the influence of the mistress of the household, and there were present in the decorations of the room in which I found myself, as well as of the parlors leading therefrom, certain, deft touches which predicated the presence of woman as positively as the prattlings of a nursery. There was an indescribable something in the grouping of furniture, a harmony in the hues and forms, that made of each room a poem with individual character. The soul of art was abroad in the house and sanctified it. The predominating sentiment was a delicate blending of the sensuous with the spiritual. Here a swinging

PHANTASM AND FLESH.

censer, itself a priceless art fabric, anointed the air with the faint perfume of Persian roses. Yonder a glorious Magdalen in oil saluted heaven with moist eyes. A St. Cecilia, creditably done, hung near by. The gray melancholy of a Millet landscape had for its foil and offset a vivid sunset of Corot.

I found that my environment sensibly affected me. In the few moments that intervened before my host made his appearance, I was strangely impressed by the prevailing tone of the place, and I was seized with a sudden eagerness to meet the woman who had left the stamp of her personality on the material forms about me. When Black joined me, the contrast between him and his surroundings was so harshly empha-

sized as to be fairly painful. At the club he was simply obnoxious. To meet him here was to find a Goth in the gardens of Sallust, to see the unbreeched dominant in Versailles — in a word, to meet a money-changer in the temple. Something of this he must have read in my face, but it did not disturb his serene complacency. He had the matter-of-fact self-possession of an animal.

He expressed his pleasure at seeing me. He was delighted, to be sure. Mrs. Black, too, would be pleased. An artist, like myself, would appreciate Mrs. Black. She was considered a mighty handsome woman, and, if she were well enough to go into society, he guessed she'd throw some of the belles into the shade.

So he rattled on, while I listened in impassive contempt. His words grated on me. It was not their coarseness simply. I took a strange, pitying interest in this wife, delicately nurtured and high-minded, as I felt she must be, and I longed to take by the throat the clod who would seek to make a raree-show of her charms.

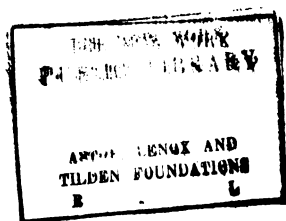
On the stillness, at this moment, there broke the echo of a step in the hall, — faint, at first, from distance; then distinct; now muffled in the rugs that littered the tessellated floor; now clear and sharp in the open, — a woman's step, light, elastic, firm; not, apparently, the tread of an invalid. The next instant, the folds of a silken portiere were drawn aside, and my hostess entered.

I heard Black mumble some formula of introduction. I raised my eyes, and a chill like the rigor of death seized upon my every limb. My Esther stood before me in the flesh, queenly and radiant and beautiful with the more than mortal beauty which had dazzled me in my keef dream. The light of recognition in her glorious eyes was clouded by a passing shadow of perplexity, if not of pain. The commonplaces of greeting were frozen on her lips. Her gaze wandered slowly from my face to that of the man by my side. A sudden tremor came upon her, and the next moment she fell swooning in my arms.

I bore her across the room and laid her, limp and motionless, upon a sofa. This I did mechanically,



THE MEETING IN THE FLESH.



for there had come to me that saving stupor which fences the mind against madness in the crucial moments of great emotion. All the while, I was conscious of contending against an imperative impulse to fold my dear one to my heart and kiss again the lips whose wine I had so often quaffed in our keef trysts. But the chill, gray eye of the ogre, Black, pursued me, and, alas! I knew that my bride in the mystic realm of spirit was his wife in the world of flesh.

He had never lost his imperturbable self-control for a moment. He assured me, as he rang for a maid-servant, that there was no occasion for alarm, that his wife was subject to these attacks, and he begged me to be at my ease. I do not recall the terms of my reply.

KEEP.

It was to the effect that I could not think of intruding at such a time. I took my leave at once and with scant ceremony. I was glad to gain the outer air. My heart was sick, my brain dizzy, and the pulses in my wrists and temples throbbed almost audibly.

PHASE V.

THE PASSING OF ESTHER.

FOR some days after this strange adventure, I was sorely harassed in mind. The stern discrepancy between my relations with Esther in our ideal life and those which fate had imposed upon us in the material world, was to me a source of poignant anguish. Mingled with the pangs of personal loss, there was a keen regret that the irony of events should have condemned that pure and noble woman to the control of such a wretch as Ralph Black. That he was abhorrent to her I could not doubt. The faun does not consort with the satyr, the angel with the animal. The

marriage of this brilliant, sensitive and high-minded woman to such a sordid, mercantile monster as Black could have had its origin in nothing short of compulsion. But married to him she was; and I knew that, however repugnant to natural law, the compact was hedged about with all the dignity of statutes and maintained by all the force of human conventions.

I nursed my grievance against fate, and, while the wound in my heart was still green, I made successively many rash resolves. I vowed that I would raze the artificial barriers which civilization with its stupid laws had set between my love and me. I would tear my bride from this palace where a tyrant had immured her

and bear her away to some secluded Eden-land in the distant, dreamful East. Failing in this, at least, I could slay the man who stood between us. Or — and this, the latest suggestion lingered with me long — might not suicide for her and me be the best solution of the enigma?

Such were the meditations to which my misery drove me; and I doubtlessly should have developed and put into execution one of these desperate plans, were it not for a potent influence which was steadily at work, soothing and solacing me with a real and present joy. This was keef, my familiar. The fragrant vapors of my keef-pipe annulled the wretched accidents of the lower life, and transported me to the substantial

beatitudes of the kingdom of the spirit. There Esther was still mine, and mine alone, giving herself to me with the unrestraint of passion, and revealing to me, in the tender reciprocity of love, the infinite possibilities of a woman's devotion. Why, then, need I repine? After all, no social convention, no man-made code, no mummery of priest or magistrate could sever me from my spirit bride. The nominal union between her and Black, I argued, was not such as properly to cause me distress. It was essentially impossible that it could be a more intimate communion than that of the jailer and his victim. He might exert constraint over her person and her movements, but mental dominion, spiritual sympathy — these were

THE PASSING OF ESTHER.

my prerogatives. She had swooned in my presence, she came at my bidding, she illumined my life with her love. I smoked and was content.

Still, I could not refrain from setting on foot certain inquiries touching the previous history of my beloved. I confided to Chalmers enough of my strange experience to interest him in the quest, and, through his investigations, I was soon in possession of the outlines of Esther's sad story. To be sure, the details which he gathered were made up mostly of the hints which club men whisper over their wine, but, when strung together, they formed a narrative sufficiently succinct and bearing intrinsic evidences of truth.

Esther was the only child of a

diamond merchant whose wealth, culture and magnificence had, for years, lent a splendor to the fashionable society of the city. Her mother had died while she was yet a girl. Dowered with a bewildering physical beauty, and with rare brilliancy of mind, she found herself, upon her coming-out, the petted darling of society, beleaguered by admirers on all sides. She accepted homage and rejected suitors; both as a matter of course. At twenty-two years of age, she wrote and published "A New Pygmalion." Its success was such that she might well have been ready to avow it as the product of her pen, and she undoubtedly would have broken the seal of secrecy but for a calamity which befell her father and which had for

THE PASSING OF ESTHER.

her a fateful sequence. The exact character of this mischance was not known. It had to do with certain operations in Mexican mining stock. It involved financial failure, certainly, and, possibly, social disgrace. These consequences were averted by the timely intervention of the broker, Ralph Black. There were not wanting those who said that Black had enticed the old merchant into a trap, with a view to rescuing him at the eleventh hour for a good and sufficient consideration, and that Esther was that consideration. The rumor of the merchant's impending insolvency was met simultaneously by a denial and by the unexpected announcement of his daughter's marriage to Black. The ceremony was secret, and, from the day of its

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celebration, the brilliant, society belle had lived the life of a recluse. She had now been married six months, and, during that period, she had never graced a social function. The mask of the author of "A New Pygmalion" was never formally lifted. This, said the knowing ones, was not to be wondered at, since one of the characters in the story, the villain of the tale, was a realistic and thinly veiled portrait of Ralph Black. Awesome mockery of fate, that gave the fair, young author to the keeping of a husband whom she loathed and whom she had pilloried by her art. One week after her marriage, Esther's father died. Had he thought of doing so a few days earlier, he would have rendered needless a voluntary sacri-

fice which had in it the direful elements of a blood atonement.

Such was the gloomy narrative which I contrived to piece together—a melancholy mosaic of my own inferences and the bits of information gathered by Chalmers. When I had digested the story, I felt more strongly than ever that Esther was indeed mine, and that she had not and never could have had anything in common with the creature who called himself her husband. Yet, despite the ravishments of our keef trysts, I could not but feel interested in her physical environment and welfare. In the intervals of my keef visions, I took to patrolling the streets about her house by night, watching, with a lover's fond infatuation, the play of lights in the windows, and won-

dering which of the countless rooms in the great mansion held the treasure that occupied my thoughts. After a time, I plucked this precious secret from a servant whom I corrupted with tips. Then I had won a new happiness. I spent hours at a time in the shadows of the corner opposite the dwelling, straining my eyes at the lace that draped her windows. Only to be near her was a delight, giving me, as it did, a vague sense of guardianship. To catch a glimpse of her figure silhouetted against the window-shade, was to be transported with joy. How my heart went out during those solitary vigils in fervent wishes for her well-being! The aspirations I breathed there in the dark had in them something akin to the ardor

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and unselfishness of perfect prayer. Now and again, I detected myself in the act of uttering an impassioned apostrophe; and it is certain that, more than once, I flung kisses at my loved one's curtained windows with all the extravagance of an amorous boy.

It was after a vigil of this sort that, as I was returning home one wintry night, I suddenly became aware that I was followed. The tall figure of a man, swathed in a voluminous top-coat, was dogging my footsteps with the pertinacity of a shadow. The man kept at some distance behind me and regulated his gait by mine. When I halted, he turned into a side street, only to re-appear in my wake when I proceeded on my way. Gauging his pace, I calculated the moment

when he would necessarily walk under the searching rays of an arc-light which I had just passed. When that moment arrived, I pivoted about suddenly and scanned my pursuer. He was not fifty yards away, and I recognized him at once. Strangely agitated, I resumed my walk, and, on reaching my abode, entered it without looking back. The man who had shadowed me was Ralph Black; and I had seen that his face, livid under the eerie glamour of the electric light, was convulsed and distorted by passion into the semblance of a tragic mask.

It was apparent that he was suspicious of me—jealous, perhaps. Somehow his attention had been called to my nightly vigils. Possibly, he had connected these

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with the agitation which I had betrayed on the occasion of my memorable meeting with his wife. In any case, it was plain that, to save Esther embarrassment, I must discontinue my visits to the neighborhood of his house. I managed, however, to maintain my watch over my beloved in another way. Through the domestic whom I still contrived to keep in my pay, I received full and frequent reports of the goings-on in the Madison Avenue mansion.

From this source, I learned that there was a permanent estrangement between husband and wife,—barely glozed over in the immediate presence of the servants by the most conventional of courtesies. I learned, too, that the mysterious malady which afflicted the mistress

of the household showed no signs of abating; that, at the most unexpected moments, the lady would fall in a faint and gradually pass into a trance-like state in which she would lie for hours. These attacks were increasing in severity, and, for some time back, had been of daily occurrence. The affliction, so far, had proved absolutely beyond the control of the doctors. The best experts on nervous diseases in the city had been in attendance and had agreed in their diagnoses. It was, said they, a pronounced case of hysteria, unaccompanied by functional disturbance and without any of the symptoms of organic disease. They agreed, too, that, if the attacks continued, death by exhaustion must shortly supervene. One of the

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peculiar features of the case was that the fair patient seemed in no wise distressed by her critical condition, had none of the dread of an attack which characterizes the ordinary cataleptic, and contemplated the prospect of speedy death with the greatest cheerfulness.

This information I obtained piecemeal and from time to time, so that it did not immediately occur to me that this novel ailment which baffled the physicians was referable to the ascendancy which I had gained over the mental life of Esther. No sooner, however, did I appreciate this likelihood, than I set out to confirm or disprove the theory by conclusive experiments. For several weeks I made a point of chronicling the hour and the moment at which I

sought the solace of my keef-pipe. On comparing this record with the information subsequently brought to me, I found that my keef visions and the swooning fits which perplexed the doctors were uniformly simultaneous and co-extensive in duration. I further learned that these peculiar attacks had begun at the very period when, under the magic spell of keef, I read, for the first time, "A New Pygmalion." I desisted from smoking for several days. During this period, the afflicted lady was exempt from the fainting fits. I reverted to the drug, and the strange malady asserted itself at once.

I now found myself face to face with a problem the solution of which was fraught with the weightiest consequences both to my be-

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loved and myself. It was clear that to continue to induce my keef visions was, by implication, to pass sentence of death on Esther. Was I justified in taking such a course? For the consequences to myself I did not care. I had now been addicted to the almost daily use of keef for eight months, and my physical system was fast sinking under the stress of abnormal stimulation. The constant inhalation of the powerful vapors of the drug had affected my lungs. I had a cough, night-sweats and other well-defined symptoms of pulmonary weakness. My nervous energies were impaired, and the spectre, insomnia, was my frequent bed-fellow. I had sought no physician. I was familiar, through study, with the physiological effects of keef,

and knew that to persist in the consumption of the drug meant death, and death preceded, mayhap, by mania. But I had stared the future in the face without ceasing to smoke for a day. Death had no terrors for me now. Experience had convinced me that the higher flights of soul were retarded, rather than assisted, by the activity of the bodily functions, and I knew that to be released from the bondage of the flesh was to be franked forever as a citizen of that bright universe wherein it had been given me to meet my spirit bride. Surely every selfish interest should prompt me to continue my indulgence in the drug and thus speed the day which would bring me nearer to my dear one.

But Esther's welfare, and that

alone, was my controlling thought, I hesitated to impose on her the ordeal of dissolution which I welcomed for myself. In my perplexity, I abandoned keef for the space of a week or more. The tortures which I had suffered during previous periods of abstention seemed tripled now, tortures of mind and body, agony of soul, caused by the self-imposed isolation from my bride, and the racking physical pangs of the outraged nerves that craved their wonted stimulant. It was after learning that, throughout this interval, Esther, while improved in physical health, was the prey of an abiding melancholy, that my final resolution was taken. It was plain that the severance of our intercourse meant suffering for her no less than for myself. Better by

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far that she should die the death of the flesh than that she should linger on in the lower life, saddened in spirit, and linked to an alien destiny. Death for her would be emancipation. The doubts which had assailed me now gave way to a sense of perfect peace. I invoked again the sorcery of keef and joyfully anticipated the issue.

At rare intervals, I went with Chalmers to the club. Black was seldom there. On the few occasions when I met him, there was a marked embarrassment in his manner. At times, I fancied that I could detect in his eyes something of the sombre and vengeful glow which I had remarked on the night when he dogged me in the streets. It did not surprise me to hear that he had tried to coax from Chalmers



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THE PASSING OF ESTHER.

certain particulars as to my character and antecedents.

Three months after my return to the use of keef, Esther died. She passed away in a trance. Hers was an idyllic death. She simply forgot the strife, the suffering and the sinning of the world; and the memory of misery never came back to her. Her passing was but the sequel to a love tryst. She fell asleep in my bosom, and never knew again the pain of waking to the unrealities of earth.

Unbidden, I went to the house of death. In the hush of the taper-lit parlor, I looked unmoved on the marble beauty of the body that had been hers. Unbidden, I followed the funeral train to the grave and stood by at the burial, with undimmed eyes. I had no cause to

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mourn. The insensate clay which they gave back to earth was not my bride. The coffin held the wife of Ralph Black. It was not Esther. That radiant and immortal spirit had passed from the purgatory of the flesh into a heaven of light and love. She was mine for time and for eternity. I knew that in that very moment she waited for me on the threshold of the home of ideal love.

PHASE VI.

ASHES TO ASHES.

How shall I describe the splendor that entered into my keef ecstasies with the passing of Esther from the prison-house of the flesh! The raptures of my earlier visions were multiplied, and the joy of dwelling in the ideal world wherein my Esther now had her abiding-place was rarer, keener than before. There had been times when the magic of my precious drug was slow to work, and the coming of Esther to the keef-tryst, delayed. This was occasioned, most likely, by the unfavorable conditions of her environment and the adverse influences of Black's personality.

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Now she was free, and to be free was to be mine. She lingered ever at the frontier of the senses and beckoned me to bliss. Small wonder, then, that I abandoned myself to the witching drug which proffered me hourly the open-sesame to the kingdom of life. Night and day, I kept the incense of keef burning on the altar of my love. For me, the external universe, that chaos of shadows in conflict which men call the world, ceased to have significance. I never went abroad. I lost all track of dates and days. Needless to say, I did not paint. From the hour when I put the last touches to the sublime canvas on which I had materialized the face and form of Esther, I never took brush in hand. And this, I reasoned, was

just and seemly. In painting Esther I had attained the acme of art, I had grasped ideal perfection. For him who has dwelt in the seventh heaven there is no promise of joy in the allurements of a lower paradise.

It was late autumn when Esther entered into peace, and one night, soon after the funeral, the winter swooped down upon the city. A sudden blizzard gagged the streets with snow and stifled the rioting voices of the town. Only the measured rumblings of the elevated trains survived the assault of the storm. These boomed, now and again, through the curtained depths of my keef chamber—echoes of the dread artillery on the battle-field of life. I lay on the divan, caressing the trusty keef-pipe

which now seldom left my hand during my conscious hours. I was spent with bodily weakness, and at intervals I coughed desperately. A week before, a physician whom Chalmers insisted on calling in had clapped a stethoscope to my wasted ribs, had listened learnedly through a brace of rubber tubes and finished by tabooing keef and prescribing Colorado. I had smiled at him, and, after his departure, I discussed with Chalmers, in a philosophic spirit, what my friend chose to call my "suicide." I failed to win from him outright acquiescence in my course, yet I could not but feel that his reproaches sprang from the strength of personal affection rather than from any weakness of his reason, and that he knew in his heart that

mine was the way of wisdom ; for I had told him enough of my esoteric history to convince him that loss of life would mean for me an infinite gain in living.

On the tall easel in the alcove that fronted my couch, stood the material embodiment of my beloved Esther. The constant beauty of her face caught new and fickle graces from the flames that spurted in the great fireplace, quilting the candle-light with fantastic patterns. As I looked upon the marvel on the canvas, I recalled the dumb, delightful ecstasy of Chalmers when I had set before him, for one jealous moment, this last unanswerable argument in the cause of keef and love. From that instant, he had ceased to rebuke me for my devotion to the mystic drug. Poor

fellow! I knew that I had bought his silence at the expense of his peace of mind. From that hour, I saw in his eyes the soul-hunger of one to whom the vision of bliss has been vouchsafed only to be withdrawn, and I pitied him for the hopeless desire which the glimpse of Esther's perfections had kindled in his heart.

My reverie was molested by the stealthy, sandalled footfall of my giant nurse, black Hassan. He surprised me with a visiting-card. My only callers were Chalmers and the doctor, and their visits were paid without the medium of any such formal announcement. To the big Soudanese, the bit of pasteboard was clearly a thing of fateful import, a hieroglyphic talisman which had aroused all the feti-

chism of his native desert. He held it gingerly and surrendered it with apparent relief.

The inscription on the card startled me into a momentary confirmation of the negro's empty alarms. The name was the name of Ralph Black. I composed my face and ordered Hassan to show in the visitor. Rising, meanwhile, not without physical pain, I hurriedly drew the silken screen over the picture of my beloved. The next moment, I was back on my couch, blowing wreaths of aromatic incense into space.

I greeted Black nonchalantly, almost flippantly.

"Pray be seated and make yourself at home!" I said.

The man ignored alike my invitation and the ill-disguised mock-

ery of my tone. For a full minute he stood voiceless, staring at me with stolid face. His colossal shape dwarfed everything in sight. Surely, in the gross world of matter, this mammoth was king by right divine of superior bulk. As he towered before me, I recalled the malevolence pictured on those massive features, in the white glare of the electrics, the night he followed me home from my vigil under Esther's window. His countenance was haggard now, and had a strained, set look that was newer to me than the baleful, detective gleam in his eyes.

I had no conversational nothings to offer the man. His very presence in the place consecrated to art, to Esther and to love, savored, to my mind, of sacrilege. I re-

sumed my pipe and waited in silence until he should disclose his errand, if errand he had. At last he spoke, briefly and to the point, with a cold formality in his voice, akin to that impassive fixity of face which the fire that lived and leaped in his eyes belied.

"Abecassis," he said, "I have come to renew an old request. You can do me the greatest kindness one man ever did another; and you are the only man in all the world who can do this thing. I want to ask you to paint the portrait of my wife."

"Your wife? Yours?" I interposed.

The sneer was scarce suppressed, but it was lost on Black. At least, he gave no sign of resentment.

"My wife—my dead wife," he

went on. "You can do it from memory. You have the skill, the art, and you have seen her. Artists do not forget the faces of the beautiful — and she was beautiful. I know you have not forgotten her."

The man spoke this last slowly, tentatively, focussing his glowing eyes on me the while, as though they were torches to light him to the secret places of my soul. I looked him in the forehead, unflinchingly — more — defiantly.

"I have forgotten nothing — and forgiven nothing," I said.

Black turned on his heel, and, walking to the window, stood peering through the snow-flecked pane into the storm. His tense posture and twitching fingers spoke of the excitement which bade fair to mas-

ter his iron nature. After a time, he came over to me, with the sudden and eager movement of the gambler who plays his last trump.

“They told me you were sick, Abecassis—dying,” he said. “But you shall not die until you have done this thing for me. And not then, if it is your will to live. For, between us, we have gold enough to fight off even death. Listen, Abecassis, I angered you once by offering you money. I was wrong in that, but it was not till afterwards that I learned that you were rich. Don’t misunderstand me now. I offer you now, not money, but wealth, my fortune, riches so vast that, united to your own, they will make of you a force among men greater than the power of parliaments, or congresses, or

kings. Listen! you have learning and talents. Add to your means the millions which I can and will deliver, and you can make the world your carriage and mankind your footman. All that I ask, in return, is a few hours of effort that will cost you nothing, that will not make your mind the poorer by a thought, that will not steal so much as a touch from the cunning of your hand. For God's sake, don't say 'No!' Promise me you'll paint the picture — *her* picture. I beg you to promise. See! I'm begging."

His speech was headlong, breathless. He had thrown himself on his knees, and grovelled there, pleading.

It may have been piteous, but it only seemed grotesque to me. My

brain tingled with the subtle intoxication of keef. A mocking devil danced in my heart. Strength came to me—a strength born of the spirit of scorn and reprisal. I leaped from the divan and ripped aside the drapery that hid the prisoned phantom of my bride.

“Look!” I cried. “Look! Do you recognize the likeness?”

Black rose and stood rooted and dumb, like a man enchanted, smitten by the spell of beauty. His gaze was riveted on the canvas. He seemed unconscious of my words—of everything, save only the vivid presence on the easel.

At last he spoke, thickly, feverishly:

“From memory?”

“From life,” I replied, “throbbing, clinging, odorous, amorous

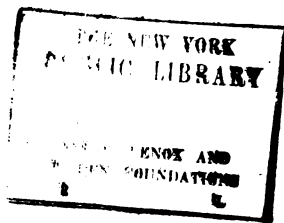
life. From hourly, daily, nightly sittings. Fool! The lady whom you call your dead wife was and is my living bride, my deathless mate."

I was beside myself. I know not all I said, but I did not lack for phrases. Words flew from me, winged and hissing, like arrows from a well-bent bow; rancorous, stinging words, apt and fit to bite their way into a heart of bronze and poison all the springs of consciousness.

I pointed to a copy of "A New Pygmalion" that lay on the table at my side, and reminded Black that in the book the Sibylline genius of Esther had laid bare the spiritual deformities of his nature. I upbraided him for constraining that noble being to link her earthly



THE MIRACLE ON THE EASEL.



fortunes with his sordid lot. He had profaned a jewel, and it had turned to cinder in his hand. He was free to reclaim the clay which he had given to the worms; but Esther, I boasted as mine, mine alone. I claimed her for my own before high heaven and to his teeth—mine for all time, for eternity, my love, my dearest one, my own.

Black heard me out, standing stiff and silent, as before. Could it be that his muddy blood remained unstirred by my gibes? Ah! no. The charm that bound him was the picture. I noticed now that his eyes were fixed unfalteringly on the painted shape of Esther. They had lost their sullen fire, and in them was a wondrous tenderness, together with some-

thing of the nameless entreaty which graces the gaze of the dumb. Nothing could have goaded me to the fury with which that look inspired me. Had this swine, then, so keen an appetite for husks? Good! he should feed his fill upon them. The picture should be his, but as Esther was his—in nothingness.

“Black,” I said, “I need no painted image to keep my sweetheart’s memory in my soul. This is but the shadow of a substance which is forever mine, and the shadow shall cease from this moment. You have locked away the dust of what you called your wife. Stay, and you may gather again the ashes of an immortal beauty.”

Frenzy lent me strength to carry out the whim which had seized

upon my fancy. In a trice, I tore the picture from its easel, dragged it from the alcove and hurled it far into the flaming cavern of the great fireplace.

For a second, Black seemed dazed by the unexpected movement. The next instant, with the single word "Madman!" he flung himself upon me and threw me back upon the divan. His thick and bony fingers choked the outcry in my throat. I was weak and wasted by illness, and my puny struggles availed nothing. I saw the big veins in his forehead swollen to a horrid purple. His eyes fairly stabbed at mine. They were strained and bloodshot and lurid with the menace of murder. I caught the flash of white metal. I heard the click of a revolver and

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against my hot and drumming temple I felt the cold muzzle of the weapon. Then my jaded nerves failed me and I lost consciousness.

PHASE VII.

THE ATAVISM OF HASSAN.

WHEN I came to myself, I found that I was the prisoner of a temporary paralysis, which held me as helpless on my couch as if I had been bound hand and foot. A few feet away, stretched full length on the marble floor, Ralph Black and my servant Hassan lay locked in each other's arms and wrestling to the death. Powerless to aid, and scarce awake to my own vital concern in the issue of the fight, I watched the wrestlers with a lazy, artistic interest, as if theirs were an alien combat, and I a chance spectator.

Physically, the men were well

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matched. Black had the advantage in weight; possibly, too, in sheer, brute strength. Hassan excelled him in agility, in height and reach. Both were powerful, well-groomed animals, in the very pink and prime of life, superb types of their respective races. Evidently, the hand-to-hand conflict had already lasted some time, for both men were glowing with heat and puffing with the exertion of the fight. Black was hampered by his snugly fitting garb of fashionable cut, while Hassan's Eastern costume gave loose and easy play to his every movement. They were on their feet now, and Black was making a frantic effort to lift his antagonist and hurl him to the floor. At one moment, Hassan's long, lithe back and turbaned head

hung balanced and vacillating above the brawny trunk of his adversary; but directly the negro regained his footing and, by a dexterous manœuvre, tripped his opponent, bringing him to his knees. In half a minute, Hassan was dragged down by the white man, and the battle was resumed upon the floor.

To and fro, under and over, the giants tumbled, in a desperate contest for the mastery. Now Hassan won a brief supremacy and appeared poised upon the boulder-like frame of his adversary, only to be toppled over the next instant, when, by a mighty output of his Titanic strength, Black got the upper hand and, for the moment, held him down. During these checkered vicissitudes of the struggle, limb

groped for limb, arm gripped arm, and knee clenched knee, as if by a sort of instinct; so that it seemed as though the very joints and sinews of the gladiators were their conscious partners in the fight.

Clearly, the aim of each man was to pin his opponent to the floor and choke him into submission. Scarcely an arm's-length away, and between my couch and the heads of the wrestlers, there shone on the floor the pearl-handled pistol with which Black had attempted my life. It was plain that my faithful serving-man had flung himself on my assailant just in the nick of time, knocking the weapon from his hand; and I readily guessed that the duel I now witnessed was a fight for the possession of the pistol.

THE ATAVISM OF HASSAN.

Of a sudden, Black's right arm unlaces itself from the negro's hold, and his eager fingers snatch convulsively at the coveted weapon, but Hassan's left lunges out to checkmate the movement. Elbow hooks elbow again, and the deadlock remains unbroken. Still clinging to his adversary, the supple Hassan squirms, twists and slips from under, and the giants lie side-wise, parallel, and eye to eye, in a strenuous embrace of hate. The white man struggles with a rigid face, dogged and silent, after the manner of the Saxon who fights for his life. Hassan wastes his wind in eloquent, Arabic blasphemies that blow through his set teeth like the hiss of escaping steam.

Balked in his latest attempt, Black nerves himself for a super-

human effort, and pushing the huge momentum of his big body at the resisting Hassan, using his massive knee as a lever, he again succeeds in getting the Sou-danese under him. He grapples at the negro's throat, only to be foiled by the clutching hand of the wary, black man. Whenever he manages to free an arm from the grape-vine grip of the negro, Black rains blow after blow, with clenched fist, on the face, neck and body of his opponent. This style of warfare is plainly unfamiliar to Hassan, and, when he seeks to reply in kind, his clumsy passes are warded from vital points by the arts of the boxer.

Both men are spent and panting painfully now. But there is no truce, as there is to be no quarter.

THE ATAVISM OF HASSAN.

With congested faces and distended eyes, they tear at each other like fiends. Black's straw-like hair reeks with sweat. It glistens in beads on his cheeks and forehead. It drips onto the steaming neck of the negro. Suddenly, with one gigantic tug, the white man wrenches the body of his opponent several inches from the floor and hurls it, with all the added weight of his own, great frame, back again upon the marble. Hassan's head crashes upon the stone, and, on the instant, his long, elastic arms fall limp and lifeless to the floor, the taut muscles of his black calves relax, his chin drops, and the pupils desert his eyes, leaving the upturned whites to stare blind and deathlike into the remorseless face of his opponent.

KEEP.

It is over now. I see the lumbering shape of Black lurch heavily forward, eclipsing the inert and sprawling form of his vanquished foe. His fingers close on the pistol-butt. A sense of the folly of an outcry in that great, silent house taunts me at the moment, and yet I essay to shout aloud. In vain. I am not only bedridden, but speechless.

In the next breath, I beheld a marvel of bodily prowess that seemed incredible. Hassan had risen from the dead. His face, buried under the overlying bulk of his opponent, I could not see, but I saw his long and sinewy arms flash out and close like talons about the great, bull neck of his adversary. I saw his legs—twin serpents, bare, black and quivering

—spring aloft, vivid with the play of corded muscle, and twine themselves like a whiplash about Black's mighty limbs. I saw — nay, I *felt* — the tense and vibrant strain of Hassan's every sinew, as, with a quick, nervous jerk, he pulled down the head of the white man till it rested, cheek by jowl, alongside its black fellow, in a resistless and demoniac caress. The African was silent now. The white man lay motionless, an ox passive in the coils of a boa-constrictor. The pistol had fallen from his inert fingers, and over his visage there crept a horror of agony that sickened me as I looked.

What had come upon the Anak that had robbed him of his powers? His huge body lay idle as a corpse. Only the spasm in his

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face and the mute agony of his beseeching eyes bespoke him conscious still. His tongue protruded between his lips. A livid, purple flush came into his cheeks as I watched, and his breathing, which had seemed to cease, became audible and echoed in the silence, rasping and stertorous — a long-drawn groan, measured, monotonous, maddening to the ear. At that moment, he would have served for a model of the condemned undergoing the penalty of the garrote, and I should have said unhesitatingly that Hassan had throttled him, were it not that the lean and claw-like hands of the black Hercules were plainly in my view, knitted and interlaced into a living lock at the back of the white man's burly neck.

In another second, the mystery of it all was made only too clear, for, trickling down from under the white man's head, oozing out into the spectral candle-light, across the mosaic of colored tiles, and staining them with a more vivid and fearsome hue, I saw a rivulet of blood — human blood — the blood of Hassan's victim, Ralph Black. It all flashed on me now. The black man's swoon was a sham, the ruse of a barbarous brain. Thrown off his guard, in his murderous haste to regain control of his revolver, the white giant had exposed to his foe that one spot which is, of all others, the most vulnerable in a duel between unarmed men, — the throat. And in that critical moment, the domestic training of years and all the schooling of

civilized associations were wiped out for Hassan. The wild atavism of his desert blood stirred in his fevered veins. He forgot even to be a Mussulman. He was only the tribesman of the Soudan, and he obeyed the brutish impulse to bury his teeth in the flesh of his enemy.

The horror of it gave me back my voice. With a supreme effort, I half-lifted myself from the divan and shouted at the negro a frightful, Arabic curse.

"Up, you beast!" I cried. "Shall a son of the Prophet feed on the carrion of an infidel? Up, this instant! The white devil is dead."

Sullenly, reluctantly, but at the word, the loyal savage disentangled himself from the form of his opponent and rose to his feet. He

stood before me cringing under the sting of my reproaches, like a mastiff after a whipping. But reason had returned to him, and he said pleadingly:

"Allah knows that he would have taken your life, my master."

I did not choose to look him in the face, for I knew that there was that upon it the thought of which was enough to make me shudder.

"Look you, Hassan," I replied. "Life is a small matter. But great is Mohammed, and great is the Koran of Mohammed. You have broken the law of the Prophet. If you would make your peace with Allah, bind up the wound you have opened."

The habit of submission reasserted itself. The negro made a low salaam, saying, simply:

"*Bismillah*, I obey."

And forthwith the honest fellow unwound the scarf of his turban, and kneeling by the prostrate form of his enemy, proceeded adroitly to bind and knot the improvised bandage about Black's bleeding throat. I noticed, however, that he first took the precaution to pick up the pistol which had been the bone of contention and thrust it into the folds of his sash.

It was a needless provision. For, while Black had never lost consciousness, and was even now greatly revived, the fever of strife had been drained out of him. He trembled from head to heel, and when, after several attempts to rise, he finally got his footing, he wavered unsteadily, like a candle-flame in a draught. He had lost

his nerve. He spoke no word. Silently, with eyes averted, he staggered to the door, groping as he went, like a sleep-walker. We heard him stumble down the staircase, and the clangor of the outer door, slamming at his back, told us that he had gained the street.

The scene had so exhausted me that he had scarcely gone before I fell into a heavy, comatose sleep by which I was greatly composed and refreshed. When I woke, it was day. The storm had passed, and the morning was sparkling with sunlight and white with the jewels of the snow.

PHASE VIII.

A COMMONPLACE TRAGEDY.

THE melodramatic visit which Mr. Black had done me the honor to make was an episode very far from my liking. The long habit of mental ease to which I had accustomed myself, and my studied isolation from the jarring influences of the rude and unreal outer world, made the experience positively painful in retrospect. The excitement of the fact itself, the rush of incident and movement, had blinded me, for the moment, to the harmful effect on my spiritual temperament of this unwonted abandonment of self to the passions of the flesh. But wisdom

came to me with the morning, and, in the peace my keef-pipe brought to my vexed soul, I determined that I would put the sea between me and the possibility of a similar shock.

Besides, I now persuaded myself that Black had called upon me with the deliberate purpose of murder, and that his preliminary parley was a stratagem, designed to entrap me into such an admission as would fully justify him to himself for the act which he contemplated.

To what length might he not go in furtherance of his revenge? I did not dread a personal assault, and death had no terrors for me; but it occurred to me that Black might invoke the courts. On what ground, or by what process, I knew

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not; but he had left my house a wounded man, and grim forebodings of warrants, police justices, jails even, and all the monstrous machinery of the law, haunted me.

The prospect of any interruption of my intercourse with Esther, the possibility of the deprivation of keef, this was a danger which appalled me to think of. I could not afford to take chances.

My resolution once taken, I put it into effect forthwith, as was my habit in such matters. A steamship of the French line was due to sail for Europe at the turn of the tide. I had six hours in which to perfect arrangements. It was ample time. Hassan fetched me a dealer who took my house and furnishings off my hands, after brief

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bargaining. My keepsakes and personal belongings were soon packed, and mid-day found me cosily quartered in a stateroom of *La Sylphide*, outward bound for Havre.

My destination, of course, was Tangiers, the city of my birth, the home of all the dreams that peopled my vivid youth, the site of the House of Visions, the garden-place where men sow keef and gather, in a finite world, the flowers of the infinite. The sublime inertia of the Orient stole upon me with the mere sense of journeying Eastward.

We had passed Hellgate and were steaming down the Sound, when, in a listless moment, I picked up the morning papers—a dissipation I had not known for

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months. These headlines in *The Daily Interviewer* caught my eye at once :

SUICIDE OF RALPH BLACK.

Popular Millionaire Puts a Bullet in his Brain.

Victim of Business Worry and Overwork.

This was the story which followed :

Another victim of business cares and the prostration of overwork has been added to the list of suicides. This morning, a few minutes after midnight, the sharp report of a pistol startled belated pedestrians in the neighborhood of Ralph Black's palatial residence on Madison Avenue. A group of frightened servants rushed on to the stoop and called lustily for help. When the policeman on the beat made his appearance, he learned from the but-

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ler that the shot had been fired, apparently, in Mr. Black's private suite, the doors to which were securely locked from within. Mr. Black, the butler said, had come in late, as was his habit, and had gone directly to his rooms.

The policeman put himself at the head of an exploring party forthwith. On ascending to the millionaire's apartments, it was found necessary to force the door of his chamber. Within, the electric light was found turned on, and the bed unfumbled. Passing to the marble bath, the party came upon a grewsome sight. Lying on his back, his head bathed in a pool of blood that flowed from a smoke-blackened hole above the right temple, was the master of the house. He was quite dead. The weapon of death, a five-barrelled revolver, with an empty shell in one chamber, lay by his side. A blood-stained scarf, with the initial "A" worked in the corner, swathed his neck.

It is the theory of the police that the deceased first attempted to cut his throat and, not meeting with a speedy result, seized upon the revolver as the agent of a ready and quicker death. This theory is borne out by the fact that an examination of the throat of the deceased revealed recent lacerations, evidently made by some sharp instrument.

As I tossed the paper aside and threw myself back into the embrace of my steamer-chair, my look lighted on the mahogany face of Hassan who sat squatted on his heels at my feet. His eyes snapped with the zest of being noticed, and, through the rift of his bearded lips, I saw his white teeth flash like bayonets in the sun.

The *Morning Universe*, after a sensational account of the suicide of "The Napoleon of Finance," added this interesting paragraph:

The rash act is attributed to despondency, caused by the recent death of the beautiful and talented wife to whom Mr. Black was devotedly attached.

So he was dead. Really, it was a matter of absolute indifference to me. Living or dead, here or hereafter, his gross spirit could never

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move in that pure sphere which I already knew as heaven, and which to Esther had become an eternal home. Yet, on one point I was just a trifle curious. Could it be that this wretched nature had known the stringent ecstasy of a loyal love?

PHASE IX.

THE BEGINNINGS OF LIFE.

THE tepid sunlight of the waning afternoon bathes with tender radiance the Sacred City of the Moor. I am resting in the terraced roof-garden of my boyhood's home. The world I am about to quit is beautiful to every sense. Its murmurs ascend to me tempered by distance, even as the voice of a friend softens at the prospect of parting. Below in the bazaar, the traders drone and chaffer; the camel-drivers argue with their beasts; the mule-bells tinkle. Now, from yonder minaret, a spectral muezzin hurls at mankind his warning call to prayer, and Hassan

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and all my Moslem household fling themselves at Mecca, face-down upon the flower-gemmed roof.

"*Allah Kebar!* Yea! God is very great."

The prayer is past, and Hassan is at my side again, pressing upon me fruit and cooling drink. The gathering twilight is embroidered with the scent of roses and the strains of Moorish music. Dancing girls, round-limbed and lithe, with the solace of night in their eyes, and the fever of noon in their lips, weave magic paces about my bed. The straits' blue waters quiver and flash beyond the white walls of the town. Around and about, the terraced gardens of my neighbors, gorgeous with bloom, give back to sea and sky an an-

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swering splendor. I know, as I gaze upon the grateful scene, that I may never see again, with mortal eyes, the glory of that setting sun and all the pageantry of movement, form and color that vivifies the failing day. And still, I leave it all without a qualm. For all the raptures I have named are foreign to my truer consciousness. I see and know not these appearances. I hear and give no heed to these poor echoes of earthly incident and transitory passion.

A Presence abides with me, sweet and strong, whose brilliancy and loveliness put the world to shame. All music is but a memory of her voice. And light itself is but the shadow cast by her surpassing purity. My Esther hovers about me through all these tedious,

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latter hours. Weak of limb as I am, and racked with the pains of impending dissolution, I am comforted to find that the merest breath of my familiar, keef, will now suffice to quell my dwindling sense-life and open to my spirit the vision of the Truth whose name is Beauty. Yet I grow impatient for the hour and the moment, so near at hand, at last, when I shall put off for good the harness of the flesh and my soul shall stand forth, naked and undismayed forever, in that sincerer world, that universe of love and faith and fruition, where Esther dwells and waits.

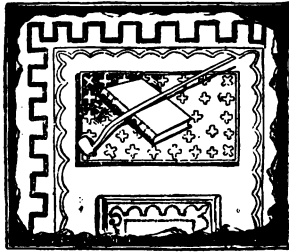
The face of my good Hassan, sullen with grief, breaks cloudily in upon my brightest reveries. The dancers have ceased, and the makers of music. The watchers

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by my bedside whisper to one another, through tell-tale fingers, that the things I write are death-dreams, and that I have not long to live.

Fools that they are! They do not know that these are but the beginnings of life.

Bismillah! Blessed be keef.



1 3, 5, 7, 9

3, 5, 7, 9

